

[Jazz Music (Chicago)]

[W366?]

Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

CHICAGO FOLKSTUFF

FORM A

Circumstances of interview

FOLKLORE

CHICAGO

No. Words

STATE Illinois

NAME OF WORKER Sam Ross

ADDRESS 713 Rush Street

DATE May 18, 1939

SUBJECT Jazz music (Chicago)

1. Date and time of interview -

April 28th - May 4-9

2. Place of interview -

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Town Room - Hotel Sherman Panther Room - Hotel Sherman

3. Name and address of informant -

Muggsy Spanier - hotel Sherman

4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant. -

None

5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you -

None

6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc. -

Night club surroundings

(Use as many additional sheets as necessary, for any of the forms, each bearing the proper heading and the number to which the material refers.)

FORM B

Personal History of Informant

CHICAGO FOLKSTUFF

FOLKLORE

CHICAGO

STATE Illinois

NAME OF WORKER Sam Ross

Library of Congress

ADDRESS 723 Bush Street

DATE May 18, 1939

SUBJECT Jazz music (Chicago)

NAME OF INFORMANT Muggsy Spanier

1. Ancestry

Irish

2. Place and date of birth, -

November 9, 1906 - Chicago

3. Family -

Irish

4. Places lived in, with dates -

Practically all over the country (stated in part in Form D)

5. Education, with dates -

Parochial grade school

6. Occupations and accomplishments, with dates -

Musician

7. Special skills and interests -

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Musician, baseball

8. Community and religious activities -

9. Description of informant -

Picture enclosed

10. Other Points gained in interview -

FORM C

Text of Interview (Unedited)

CHICAGO FOLKSTUFF

FOLKLORE

CHICAGO

STATE Illinois

NAME OF WORKER Sam Rose

ADDRESS 713 Rush Street

DATE May 18, 1939

SUBJECT Jazz Music (chicago)

NAME OF INFORMANT Muggsy Spanier

At first I started out as a drummer. Those days I used to go down to hear Joe Oliver at the Dreamland Cafe on 35th and State. Before that Joe played at the Peek-In Cafe. But I

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was too young to go inside there. Anyhow, they didn't start playing till 12:00 at night. But I used to stand outside and listen, both places. They used to have matinee dances at the Dreamland and I'd ditch school and go out there. I'd put on my brother's long pants and go there and listen to them and get up early and go to school in the morning. I must of been about 13 years old at the time and I was still playing drums. But finally I went up to my mother and I told her I wanted to play a cornet and she bought me one on time. She paid \$125 for it. I'll never forget it. It was a real pretty thing.

When the Dixieland band began to make records I bought all I could get and play them on my victrola and play my cornet with the recording. After that Joe'd let me sit in with his band. That was an unheard of thing in those days up north here, a white person playing with niggers.

The n I met the fellows from the New Orleans Rhythm Kings and I hung around with them. They were at Friar's Inn. Their manner, Joe's too, style affected me. It was a different style. Because at the time thee rage was sweet music and laughin' cornets. Tommy Ladnier was another man I admired, The Rhythm Kings man the best band put together at the time. Ladnier took Armstrong's place with Oliver and played second trumpet when Armstrong went to New York to join Fletcher Henderson's band. There were few white guys they'd let sit in with them but they let some because some couldn't play that way with any other band.

I met Bix at the Friar's Inn where the New Orleans Rhythm Kings were and we both came down to listen to them. We met in a funny way, sort of unconscious. We'd sit around and listen to the boys and then one day Bix said, "I'm a cornet player." And I said, "I'm one, too." After that we went out to the south side together and there was one place we dropped in at where there was a piano and a drum and we sat in with our two horns and we played together so well we decided we'd be a cornet team Always we met at Friar's Inn and then we'd knock around together.

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One time I tried out for a job. There was a violin, sax, piano, banjo, and drum, and they needed a cornet. I played one number and the guy threw me out. He didn't like what I was doin' with a mute.

All this time, while I was goin' to school and on a day job, I couldn't make up my mind what to do. You see I was crazy about playing ball. I was a great ball player. When I was a kid during the war the big leaguers were with the Navy team and Jeff Feffer taught me how to pitch. I wanted to be a pitcher till I got interested in music. I pitched Tesch was about 19 then. He was a quiet guy, a wonderful guy, never talked much unless he got a coupla drinks in him. He was a funny guy though. If the band didn't play exactly right he couldn't play. The band had to be perfect.

We used to make our own arrangements. We never jammed. I never went in for that stuff, jam, bringing your instrument around to another spot and sitting in and jamming. We do that ourselves though. We'd go to one of the fellows houses and have our own fun, singing the blues and playin' them. Tesch and I had a favorite place we liked to go to on 10th and Wabash, a wine place. [?]e'd drink our wine then we'd go out and listen to guys like Jimmy Noone and all that. Tesch really had an original style. I can't describe his style. I just liked him. [?]e could real swing. You know. His favorites were Rappollo, Noone, and Johny Dodds.

From the Midway I got a little job in [?]orest Park, then I went to the [?]erry Gardens. Jess (Stacey) was [wit?] with Joe Kayser and I tried to get Tesch in there but they wouldn't have him and I was pretty sore. After that I went with Ray [?]iller at the College Inn and then I went with Ted Lewis.

Friday night was a big night at the Sunset Cafe where Louis (Armstrong) was and Earl Heinous and we'd meet down there and listen to them. The only time we'd get together would be there or on recording. But we'd try to get together on the same job when we'd be clubbing around. In between the big jobs we'd have to depend on week-end jobs.

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Ted Lewis was a fine guy to work for. He like hot music even if he couldn't play it. He used to get guys like Teagarden and Fats Waller and Dorsey and McDonough to make records with him. Boy I used to get scared in the spot light. I never could stand having to get up there in the spot and play a solo. I never went for that stuff. This is a funny one. Ted's play a corny solo on his clarinet and I'd play a solo too and he'd walk back to the orchestra and say to me, "People still like what I do." When Lewis wanted my full name when he wired me for a job with him he went nuts when I put on the wire: John Francis Joseph Thomas Julian. He wanted my full name. Don Murray was in the band and he was the most underrated musician of the time. He was way ahead of his time. He was the son of a minister. He came home drunk one morning while the old man was watering the lawn and when the old man saw him he turned the hose on Don to sober him up. He really knew music. The kid studied harmony for four years. I gave Lewis plenty of headaches. I'll never forget the time I was in the hospital and Lewis came in, and without saying hello or nothing, the first thing he said was, "I told you that stuff (drink) 'd put you there."

CONVERSATION OF MUSICIANS

(From Spanier's band)

-“This guy came up and said, “Say, they sound like they're all written down. Sure they are, I said, up here.” (Pointed to head.)

-“Yeah, some guy calls me up and says, I can play more tenor'n that guy you have. Maybe you can, I said, but he's still stayin'.”

-“He says, whyn't you get [md] to play trombone? How long can he go? I saidWell, I said, George starts from there (points to knee) and goes on down.”

-“He plays a beat up horn.”

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"I like to really play second or third cornet. I like the cornet because it's got more body to it."

- "I remember in Los Angeles. Lewis said, 'who's playin' a lead? You? You? You?'

"[?]."

"Well, lemme hear it."

"And then the guy goes Pow tulla tulla [?] tulla pow."

"He's an old circus man and you know how those old circus guys are."

- "You ruin your lips on a mute."

- "[?] tell him about how the guys in Paris'd follow you around."

"Yeah, alla guys followed me around, Artie Shaw, and guys like that."

- "You need a change of pace."

- "You need arrangements."

- "I was listening to the Chicago symphony orchestra one night and the [?] t trombone man took up a solo and he hit the most beautiful meatball I ever heard. It splattered all over."

- "We got a request for There'll Be Some Changes Made."

"But he can't play Tesch's part."

"Let him play his own part."

"But people want to hear it with Tesch's part."

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"Hell, let the kid play his own way the way he wants."

REHEARSAL DIALOGUE

"After the clarinet play four bars soft ... Get it real clean before the bangout all right, take it from the clarinet boy, that's bright, boy ... go barrelhouse ... wanta run it again yeah, let's get it in that groveroo let's keep it up there right after that soft clarinet you gotta beat it right out ... all right, same place, I'm startin' to feel it a little bit now ... ah hah, that's it, ah hah ... march along now ... we gotta get something to keep that rhythm solid, see what else you can get out of them drums Aw play it, ah hah, aw play it this'll blend better how's that alcohol clarinet, ... those old timers get in that two step and you can't get 'em out of it ... You know, Chicago is a dance town Oh, that introduction isn't bad Well, throw it down an octave ... Here's an idea, if you wanna get commercial, use the wa-wan ... the idea is the guy is talking to the kid and trying to get him to [?] g go to sleep and he's a sly little kid and the old man's comin' him around: see, that's the idea and we gotta get a tune to intro ... how about a pretty four bar intro for it to carry the idea let's play it gthrough, we'll get an idea ... we gotta get a sleep idea in Nobody'll know it's sleep I'll get out and lay down on the dance floor that's somber though, that's what you want when you play these commercial things then you know you're good, everybody knows we can play hot we da da biff rah da but we got to get the other too play it again till I get the melody (singer) I like leads (singer) if it's played soft."

FORM D

Extra Comment

CHICAGO FOLKSTUFF

FOLKLORE

CHICAGO

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STATE Illinois

NAME OF WORKER Sam Ross

ADDRESS 713 Rush Street

DATE May 18, 1939

SUBJECT Jazz music (Chicago)

NAME OF INFORMANT Muggsy Spanier

Born in Chicago November 9, 1906. Educated in grammar school: Holy Name and the Cathedral Seminary. One of a family of nine children: the only musician. Started out as a drummer playing school dances. Heard Joe Oliver, and that interested him in the cornet. He told his mother that he wanted to play the cornet so his mother bought him one. Used to sneak out at night in his brother's long pants, when 12 years old, and go over to hear Joe Oliver's band at the Dreamland Cafe. Next several years he spent listening to musicians and records, trying to make up mind whether to take up drums or cornet. At about 14 played first professional job in Fox Lake with a four piece band, as a drummer. Brought cornet along and played a few numbers. Back in Chicago met Jack Pettis and Elmer Schoebel, who played in a five piece band at the Erie cafe at Clark and Erie. Sat in with them and the manager decided to put him on a steady job. After two-three months changed to several other places along Clark Street, playing with bands that played the same type of music.

Met Arnold Loyocano and Earl Wiley and several others from New Orleans. Formed band under Gene Green, a vaudeville headliner, and wanted to go to New York but the Dixieland jazz band was playing there and they were afraid to go to New York because sweet music was all the rage so they stayed in Chicago jobbing around, having a hard

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time getting jobs because Muggsy played like Joe Oliver, which wasn't considered the best of taste at that time.

New Orleans Rhythm Kings came to Chicago in 1922 to play at Friar's Inn. There Muggsy met him for the first time when he would sit in with the band. He and [?] intended to be a cornet team. They went out and sat in with bands as a team, much to the disgust of the leaders.

Muggsy joined [?]ig Meyers at the Columbia dance hall later. At that time Meyers' was one of the first swing bands. They worked at the Columbia two years, and then at White City for two more. From there Muggsy joined Floyd Towne at the Midway Gardens where he played with Frank [?] and Jess Stacy.

It was about this time that Muggsy recorded those fine records for Paramount by Charles Pierce and his orchestra. After two years joined Joe [?]ayner at the Merry Gardens for four months. Then went into College Inn with [?]ay [?]iller. While with [?]iller the band made a lot of records, among the [?] were That's a Plenty and Mississippi Here I Am.

Early in 1928 while still with Miller, Muggsy made some especially fine records with the Chicago Rhythm Kings: There'll Be Some Changes Made, and I Found A New Baby; with Tesch, Joe Sullivan, Gene Krupa and Red McKensie.

Ted Lewis was in Chicago at the time and he asked Muggsy to join the band. He stayed with Lewis seven years, turning down many offers from other bands because he enjoyed working for Ted. While he was with Lewis the band made dozens of records, with some especially fine work by Muggsy.

In 1930 the band made a tour of Europe, and in London Muggsy was the especial favorite of the then Prince of Wales, who liked particularly the way Muggsy played with a plunger mute. He met Hugues Panassie in Paris and gave him lots of information about musicians for his book.

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The band returned to NY in the fall of 1930. After a vacation Muggsy rejoined Lewis in N.Y. where they made records and went on a tour of the country. When the band got back to NY Muggsy made the series of famous records with Jim Dorsey, Coleman Hawkins, [?]ound City Blue [?]lowers, Bennie Goodman. He stayed with Lewis until 1937 when the band went to Hollywood for several pictures. Muggsy was featured in the Warners Brothers picture, Is Everybody Happy, a MGM Here Comes The Band, and several shorts for both outfits.

Muggsy left California with Lewis on another tour, the season closed in Philadelphia in December 1936. Went back to California and joined Ben Pollack's band. They played Sebastien's Cotton Club, made several shorts for Selsnick, recorded with Connie Boswell. Was also featured on Pollack's Pick-A-Rib records. Band toured the east in December 1937. Muggsy left band in New Orleans in May 1938 and came to Chicago and played with several small units while looking for talent for a band that would play his own particular style of music.

Ernest Byfield, owner of the Sherman Hotel, heard the band and immediately signed them to play in the Old Town Swing Club. Among the outstanding artists in the band are George Brunis, George Zack, pianist, Eddie Prini, tenor, Pat Pattison, bass; Russ Winslow, drums; Rod Cl[?], clarinet.